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ABSTRACT

The participatory method of image production holds enormous potential for communication and journalism scholars operating out of a critical/cultural framework. The methodological potentials of mechanical reproduction were evident in the 1930s, when Walter Benjamin contributed three enduring concepts: questioning the art/document dichotomy; placing the tension between cultural/ritual and political functions on the research agenda; and noting the radical, transformative potential of mechanical reproduction, which can operate as a springboard for methodological design. Three examples from an ethnographic pilot study of tin miners' radio in Bolivia demonstrate both the utility of the participatory method and the varieties of participation. The first example, a videotaping of a daily radio program in which housewives discussed issues in a public place, illustrates that participation in the program was not mechanically mandated but pragmatically woven into the subject matter emerging in the conduct of the program. It also illustrates that culture-specific norms governed procedures of participation. The second example, involving video shot in public places by local people, throws into question the dominance of ideology as the binding element in alternative media. The third example, videotape of a funeral of two miners, illustrates the value of participatory methods in documenting events that would otherwise be unavailable to the researcher. The use of video in this case made its most significant contribution to the research community by offering tangible products to the local culture and history. (A figure presenting principal methodological issues guiding image-making in research is included. Contains 23 references.) (RS)

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Methodological Issues in Documentary Ethnography:
A Renewed Call for Putting Cameras in the Hands of the People

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Running Head: DOCUMENTARY ETHNOGRAPHY

Abstract

Methodological Issues in Documentary Ethnography:

A Renewed Call for Putting Cameras in the Hands of the People

This paper examines the traditional uses of film, photography, and video as data gathering tools in qualitative research, and suggests that more experimentation is warranted in the area of participatory documentary. The first part of the paper offers an overview of theoretical and methodological issues, relying conceptually on the insights of Walter Benjamin and seeing how those insights have played themselves out in contemporary research. The bulk of the paper, however, presents data gathered on videotape during an ethnographic project in Bolivia during the summer of 1992. Evidence from Bolivia is organized around three types of video contributions that suggest that the area of participatory documentary is fertile for future experimentation.

Methodological Issues in Documentary Ethnography:
A Renewed Call for Putting Cameras in the Hands of the People

As I neared the conclusion of my ethnographic study of an alternative radio station in the Bolivian highlands, my final nights were taken up with the well-known rituals anthropologists frequently write about under the heading, "Exiting the Field." Intense field work and the intrusion of an outside researcher can lead to fast friendships and peculiar, often long-lasting, bonds. Such was the case with me and my compañeros, the broadcasters from the tin mining center of Huanuni.

On the night of a formal going away party, virtually the entire radio staff joined together in drinking, dancing, and story telling to wish me a safe journey home and a speedy return. As each participant took a turn to raise a glass and propose a toast, my feelings shifted from self-conscious embarrassment, to surprise and satisfaction, as I began to realize that the object of honor was not the researcher but the video camera used to collect data in the preceding four weeks. Many radio employees--from the record librarian to the station manager--learned to use the camcorder that summer, generating the majority of the video data used in my research. Tapping the expertise of research subjects by putting cameras in their hands not only established good-will and rapport, it captured important images and speeches that would have been inaccessible otherwise.

Though much methodological research has lauded the benefits of using film, photography, and videotape in qualitative studies, very little has explored availing these tools to social subjects, who are able, and perhaps most qualified, to construct their own versions of reality. I will trace out the principal issues in using film, photography, and video in qualitative studies, but do not intend to provide an exhaustive review of the literature. Rather, the bulk of this paper presents qualitative data collected in Bolivia during the summer of 1992, and explores issues raised in this data relevant to methodological

concerns. Finally, I will suggest that the issues raised in this study reach beyond the theoretical concerns of methodologians, and should enter into discussions of conduct of professional communicators, such as journalists, as well.

Image Making and Research

The salient and tenacious issues marking methodological writing on film, photography, and video are not recent discoveries. The principal battlefields, as well as methodological potentials of mechanical reproduction, were evident already in the 1930s in Benjamin's philosophical work (1969). There, Benjamin exposed the issues that remain dominant today. He suggested that the age of mechanical reproduction of images, in effect, heralded a new mode of social relations containing radical potential for audiences. In Benjamin's view, art was in transformation from fulfilling cultural/ritual functions to performing political acts, wherein viewers became social and artistic critics. "The distinction between author and public is about to lose its basic character," he prophesied (p. 232).

Although Benjamin was concerned with criticism and aesthetics, his work contained many of the issues in contemporary qualitative studies. Furthermore, his work continues to hold enormous heuristic value within critical and cultural studies today. For the purposes of this study, Benjamin contributed three enduring concepts. First, he threw into question the art/document dichotomy that permeates thinking still. Secondly, he placed the tension between cultural/ritual and political functions on the research agenda. This second point is an obscure and confusing difference, but one that retains importance in the social science arena. Finally, Benjamin noted the radical, transformative potential of mechanical reproduction, which can operate as a springboard for methodological design.

That Benjamin's concepts have endured in some form is evident in work exploring the use of film, photo, and video in anthropological research. One of the most widely used methods book in visual anthropology not only sustains functional differences in photography and video, but fiercely dichotomizes them (Collier & Collier, 1986). For

instance, Collier & Collier tenaciously differentiate between artistic and social scientific functions of photography and video. Page after page of this textbook insists that photography and video, when used in social scientific mode, are the most compete and accurate ways of capturing and analyzing culture. In her review of visual ethnography, Schwartz (1989) noted that the art versus precise record dichotomy was a dominant feature in U.S. writing on photography.

Benjamin, of course, would contest this position as nonsensical, a point that has been adopted by some researchers trying to blend the humanities and social sciences, in effect destroying the division between art and science (Becker, 1981). Discarding the boundaries between art and science raises important epistemological questions that are manifested in the methodological literature, as well. In essence, questioning the boundaries between art and science places into relief assumptions regarding the nature of knowledge as a realistic process of discovery, or as a constructive process of creation.

Whereas questioning the art/document dichotomy places epistemological concerns into the open, mere questioning does not translate into a constructivist position in research. Though Becker's (1981) overall aim was to dissolve this division when he presented the work of 12 photographic projects, he never adopted a constructivist perspective. Rather, he was quite clear in affirming a realist, objectivist position when he wrote, "Society reveals itself to people who watch it attentively for a long time, not to the quick glance of a passerby" (p. 11). In other words, Becker perpetuates the detached gaze that is the hallmark of the positivist perspective.

What seems to be a better indicator of one's epistemological perspective is the use made of films, photographs, and videos. Schwartz (1989) noted that researchers traditionally have used photographs for two purposes: (a) to analyze and present as raw data, or (b) to generate data. In Schwartz's case, for example, the author took pictures of a town and then conducted photo interviews with some residents (see Collier & Collier, 1986 for fuller

treatment and more examples of the photo interview). The responses to the pictures constituted the bulk of the data comprising her study, which she characterizes as constructivist in nature.

Photo interviews position themselves as useful ways to direct researcher attention. By asking respondents to discuss what is important, unimportant, and missing from pictures, researchers are pointed to areas of meaning that should be attended to, while mitigating the biases and presuppositions that a researcher might bring to a situation. While this line of reasoning is persuasive, it does not sufficiently acknowledge that the initial data were generated by the researcher. The matter of who gets to point the camera should be of enormous importance to anyone operating out of a constructivist frame. Nevertheless, few anthropologists--and even fewer journalists or communicologists--have placed cameras in the hands of research subjects.

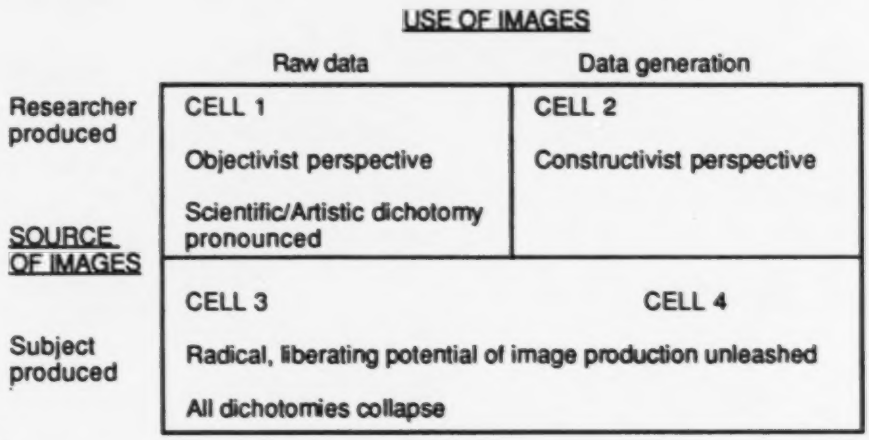
Chalfen (1992) reviewed research that tapped self-generated imagery, breaking all of the studies into three types. One type concerned the introduction of cameras by an outside researcher interested in generating data from the native point of view, a type he labeled, "coerced image production" (p. 222). I find this term misleading and pejorative (although Chalfen cited two of his own projects in this category), and will refer to it as participatory image production.[1] Of the studies he reviewed, Chalfen found that six of them were participatory. The last studies were published in 1981 (Chalfen; Ziller & Lewis), with the remainder done in the 1970s, lending credence to the observation that projects putting cameras into the hands of the people "are rarely repeated and their methods have not been incorporated into other ethnographic film productions" (Collier & Collier, 1986).

The methodological approaches discussed so far might be conceptualized along the lines suggested in Figure 1. The majority of research using film, photography, and video

[1] Collier & Collier (1986) labeled this approach, "emic attempts" (p. 157), adapting it to the anthropological dichotomy emic (insider) versus etic (outsider) perspective. I prefer participatory as it indicates a constructivist bias, while the emic/etic dichotomy retains an objectivist stance.

would collect in cell number 1, where images have been collected by the researcher and used strictly as raw data for analysis and presentation. The art/document dichotomy is most pronounced in this cell. As constructivist critiques have gained more legitimacy in academia, research has evolved in the direction of cell number 2 in an attempt to incorporate the subjects' perceptions and evaluations (see Collier & Collier, 1986 for many examples of this type of image use). Yet research in this area still retains much of the control over data collection, and hence, relevance of places and events.

Figure 1. Principal methodological issues guiding image-making in research.



My suggestion is that cells 3 and 4 are most amenable to contemporary critiques of traditional research methods. In addition, many of the methodological dichotomies tend to break down when self-generated images are the dominant data source. Worth & Adair's (1972) project in the Navajo Nation stands as an exemplar of this kind of research. Methodologically, the authors attempted to remove themselves from data collection, but always remained as observers of the data collection, arrangement, and display in order to study organizational patterns and cultural connections manifest in the imagery. The resulting films served as both data source and data generator. The researchers acted as both co-constructivists and academic observers, thus dissolving the objectivist/constructivist

dichotomy, as well. Finally, the authors gave most of the control of the films over to the specific Navajo community where they worked, precisely to avoid coercing participation, and to give something back to the people. The entire project unleashed the radical, transformative potential envisaged by Benjamin by recognizing the active subjectivity of both the researchers and the researched.

The participatory method of image production holds enormous potential for communication and journalism scholars operating out of a critical/cultural framework. Because the method has not been used widely in the communication field, much is to be explored in this area. The parameters of participation are not fixed or solidly defined. This should not be considered a weakness, but a strength allowing researchers to incorporate participatory aspects into most research. I will provide three examples from an ethnographic project in Bolivia to demonstrate both the utility of the method and the varieties of participation. Before presenting the data, I will briefly describe the research project.

Bolivian Tin Miners' Radio

During the summer of 1992, I spent six weeks in the Bolivia highlands conducting a pilot study of tin miners' radio, the longest running example of community radio in the world (O'Connor, 1990b). The project was designed as a recognizance trip to establish contacts, and to refine research categories and questions concerning alternative media. Because of its lengthy history, Bolivian tin miners' radio has generated a comparatively large body of research documenting its history and analyzing its cultural position within the country's labor movement (examples include Gumucio Dagron & Cajías, 1989; López Vigil, 1984; Lozada & Kúncar, 1983, 1986; O'Connor, 1989, 1990b). All of these studies claim tin miners' radio as an exemplar of self-managed, fully participatory media. Yet no studies have focused on the procedures of media production, attending to the implementation of participation in everyday practice. My study was driven by the research

question, how is participation enacted and implemented in everyday media practice? The goal of the study was to abstract communicative procedures that would transcend this particular exemplar and contribute to a theory of media production.

Because my study focused theoretically on participation, I felt the need to incorporate commensurate methods into my research where possible. Although the study was brief, lasting a total of six weeks, I spent four of those weeks living in a single miners' camp in the municipality of Huanuni (pop. 17,930), where, indeed, I had the opportunity to use participatory data gathering techniques.

Huanuni was selected as the principal site of the research because it is the most active mining center remaining in Bolivia, employing 1,200 miners, or one third of state workers in the mining sector. Since 1985, the tin mining industry has been in rapid decline due to the conjuncture of the collapse of the price of tin, the depletion of the country's mines, and the rise of a neoliberal government intent on privatizing the state-owned mines. Tin miners' radio--always dependent on the monthly contributions of workers--likewise is in decline, with only eight stations broadcasting during the time of my research. Of the remaining stations, Radio Nacional de Huanuni is the only one receiving funds adequate to staff a station (12 employees) to ensure regular production and broadcast. At the time of the study, Radio Nacional, as it is called, broadcast daily from 5 a.m. to 10 p.m.

During my month in Huanuni, I participated in radio production, observed the daily practices of journalists, and conducted in-depth interviews with two former and three current employees. Also, I brought a camcorder with the intention of generating data collected from the radio practitioners. How to move from intention to practice, however, was a point of uncertainty. Because we have virtually no communication studies that examine participation from the perspective of its procedures of implementation, communicative behavior usually falls into an authoritative mode reflective of transmission

beliefs that dominate communication theory.[2] Despite this dearth of communicative repertoire, the participatory aspect was the most successful component to emerge from the study.

After the first few days of my study, the radio station manager arranged to get me a room in a miners' camp through an agreement that the union has with the state mining corporation, COMIBOL. As we moved my belongings into the room, I showed the manager my video equipment. Before I could ask if anyone at the station would be interested in learning to operate the camera, he suggested that I hold a workshop so that employees might learn how to use the equipment. By the end of the day, we had agreed to host two sessions. The manager then typed up a memo announcing the workshops and posted them in the radio's main hallway and in the broadcast studio. In all, six people attended the workshops, which covered technical matters such as loading the tape, selecting the proper settings, charging the batteries, hooking up the microphone, and so on. The camcorder was left in an office in the radio station for the duration of the study so that people could check out the camera at their convenience.

About four hours of videotape were generated by the people of Huanuni during the study. Videocassette recorders and monitors were not available for playback, so none of the tapes were used to stimulate discussion or recall. While this was a lamentable disadvantage, the video provided depth to the study, nonetheless. Some of the tapes were useful for examining in greater depth certain phenomena that had been identified as important, thereby triangulating particular aspects of the study. Other footage was astounding for emphasizing cultural elements thought unimportant, thereby throwing into question some of the major propositions regarding tin miners' radio. Finally, some of the video could not have been gathered in any way other than through the use of participatory

[2] See Dervin & Clark, (1992) and Dervin (1991, in press) for a complete articulation of this problem in communication research, and a formulation of potential solutions, i.e. the mandate for procedural invention.

methods. The next section of the paper will present examples from the data to illustrate these three kinds of contributions of the tapes.

Self-generated Images:

Example 1

As the study progressed, a particular program emerged as very instructive to the research question. A daily program, Voz del Pueblo, had been created by Pilar (pseudonyms), the daughter of a tin-mining family and morning announcer at Radio Nacional. The program was broadcast each afternoon from a different neighborhood in the mining district. Using a portable, hand-held transmitter, Pilar spoke to housewives in a public space, transmitting their discussions live.

Pilar had invented participatory procedures on a multitude of levels. At the macro-level, she framed the content of the program as a public discussion of social and political problems as defined by the housewives living in Huanuni. The definitional requirement of the program demanded active participation. Still at the macro-level, she canvassed the entire town and divided it into barrios, neighborhoods, and districts (words she used interchangeably), in effect, making the only existing map of Huanuni.

Each week she selected five neighborhoods from which to broadcast. Broadcasting at least once from each neighborhood in the town was one of the goals of the program. The show was slotted to air at 3:30-4 p.m. each day to coincide with the shift change at the mine, circumscribing male participation, a difficulty that will be explained in the next paragraph. Finally, at the macro-level, she actively organized local officials as obligated listeners. That is, by explaining the foundations and organization of the program, as well as conducting regular follow-ups, Pilar held local officials accountable to listen and respond to issues emerging from the program.

Moving toward the micro-level, Pilar visited subject neighborhoods a week in advance to notify residents that her program would be broadcasting on a particular date. She

contacted the existing neighborhood associations in this step, thereby using local structures to further her own goals. It was in this step that Pilar noted that all such associations were male-dominated and that the voices of housewives were nearly always silenced in mixed gender discussions. She had determined that the program would have to air in mid-afternoon to efface male participation without offending anyone.

After all of this careful planning, Pilar explained that she still had to monitor the program as it was being broadcast in order to enact full, rich participation. From one of our formal interviews, she explained:

> But there are always people who, you could call them a little strange (gente curiosa), who are around, who want to participate but who are afraid. They prefer to stay in the background. They want to listen and observe what their neighbors have to say. What do you call them, people who stand in the background? One has to loosen them up in this sense. These are the people, the ones a little toward the back. But one can come near to them, and this is what I want. I want everyone to participate, particularly those in the background. So I draw near to them and begin to say a few words, and they want to die on the spot. We see it in the meetings; these people don't participate. So you have to make them lose their fear. You have to make them lose not only their shyness, but you have to make them start expressing themselves, as well.

Videotape of one of the broadcasts, shot by the radio's record librarian, was useful in analyzing and verifying Pilar's assertions regarding her monitoring moves. The discussion in the tape also illustrated how gender and age dynamics entered into the process.

The videotape of Voz del Pueblo lasted the duration of the program, capturing moments both on and off the air (musical interludes were dispersed throughout 5 to 10-minute blocks of interviews). Taping began the moment Pilar arrived on the scene, where only two

women were assembled. Pilar began the program by talking with the women about the neighborhood and asked them to identify the local neighborhood association director. Pilar mentioned her broadcast location, inviting all neighbors to join her, but especially calling on local director, doña Catalina, to speak on the air. Because of Huanuni's geographical location, and historical, economic, and cultural circumstances, Radio Nacional is a ubiquitous presence. Within a few minutes, doña Catalina joined the women, which fluctuated from three to eight participants during the show. The videotape added to Pilar's previous explanations of both gender dynamics and participation, which will be discussed briefly.

Although Pilar took sophisticated steps to eclipse the intrusion of gender dynamics in the program, they were reinscribed in the person of local director, doña Catalina. She spoke more than any of the other participants, consuming a little less than half of the air time. Toward the middle of the program, doña Catalina described an upcoming mass and celebration to the Virgin of Copacabana, the neighborhood's patron saint. She told of the tradition of the icon and explained the preparations that had taken place over the past months. Finally, she explained that she would be stepping down as the director after the celebration, and made some parting statements, which were counterbalanced by Pilar.

> [doña Catalina]: I would also like to ask that the new directory not undo everything that we have now. Because here, they always leave the president--especially me, they left me all alone--to do all the work like, well, like a man, frankly. Because the work of a man is what I did the last festival day, so that that day would be well arranged in our neighborhood.
>
> [Pilar]: I believe this must make everyone very proud, obviously, to have a director who is so active and concerned about this area. This is what is important. Sharing these moments is important, whether or not people appreciate it. The important thing is to bring everyone together, always in collaboration. Besides, this is

> something important for all of you to be able to demand your rights to the local authorities.

This interaction demonstrates two things. First, that gender dynamics are difficult, if not impossible, to eliminate in social situations. Doña Catalina held the normative function of a male in her unusual position as a local director, with the effects manifested in the interaction. The videotape provides credence to Pilar's previous assertions regarding gender dynamics within the neighborhoods, and adds insight regarding the moves made by Pilar to assuage the gendered presence. Second, the tape informs the research questions regarding participation. In essence, the tape demonstrates that Pilar's agenda is always present as a boundary of the participation. The discussion seemed to be veering away from social issues and moving toward personal conflicts. Pilar redirected the conversation to fit within the framework of the program as she defined it. This boundary has important consequences for our theoretical understanding of participation as a process, particularly within alternative media practice.

In addition to gender, the videotape informed the analysis regarding nonparticipants that Pilar discussed in the interview passage cited above. Throughout the program, the conversation was dominated by three women, who were clearly the oldest members present. Pilar, indeed, monitored the discussion and moved toward nonparticipants periodically to ask them for comments. As she always controlled the transmitter, reticent observers were all faced with a microphone in front of their mouths at some point in the program. At one point, the discussion centered on the problem of young lovers making out in the streets during the evenings. This problem was discussed in connection with several rapes that had recently occurred. The discussion, then, placed in relief issues of age relations and promiscuity. Two of the eldest women dominated the discussion of these topics, but Pilar turned 180 degrees and began approaching one of the young women in attendance, saying:

[Pilar]: Fine. And you my friend, as a young person, would you like to say something, as well, to allow the young people a place, to tell us how they fit in among our people.

[young woman]: I just want to say that [inaudible due to very soft voice and windy conditions] … young women [inaudible] … a bad example, as doña Marta already mentioned. That's all. Thank you [nervous laugh].

[Pilar]: Very well. Really, the young people need to voice opinions, too. But here we have a compañera who is a senior citizen, and we're going to ask her, too, for a brief message, for all the young friends who are listening.

[elderly woman]: Yes, señorita, I say the same thing, too. It's a very bad example being set by the young people and what they are doing. They are not sensitive, they haven't got much respect, not for the men, or married couples, women, or the little children. That's the way it is. They can do a few things that we are asking for. They can do it. But there is no respect in these times.

[Pilar]: We are going to thank all of our friends, the compañeras who have collaborated on this occasion with us, to help us learn the difficulties in their lives.

Together with other segments, this passage illustrated and validated Pilar's claims about involving participants who silently stand on the periphery. The examples from this tape also indicated that participation was not mechanically mandated, but pragmatically woven into the subject matter emerging in the conduct of the program. Finally, this example, in particular, indicated that culture-specific norms, such as giving the final word to the eldest participant, might govern procedures of participation.

Example 2

Two other videotapes generated during my study contributed to a more profound understanding of tin miners' radio by highlighting images and events that I initially considered to be unimportant, especially in light of the presuppositions I brought into the

field. Previous academic work on tin miners' radio has emphasized the role of radical labor politics and the concomitant working-class ideology in defining this alternative medium (O'Connor, 1990b; Lozada & Kúncar, 1983, 1986). This position has been stated most forcefully by Lozada & Kúncar (1986), who wrote, "alternative communication does not exist apart from a determining and ratifying social praxis in its company" (p. 204).

The emphasis on issues such as praxis, ideology, and hegemony has important consequences for alternative media theories. The tendency to stress these issues at best downplays the importance of participation, and at worst questions the need for participatory processes altogether. During my study in Huanuni, two tapes generated images that threw into question the dominant place of radical praxis in the radio and exposed some of the ideological contradictions of everyday life.

The first tape was recorded by a man in his early 20s whose wife was the station secretary. He asked to use the camera and videotaped his wife working at her desk in the reception area. The room was a square shape, with two solid walls and two glass walls looking out to a hallway and the main door leading into the station. The room was furnished with a glass cabinet, an office desk, two stuffed chairs, a coffee table, and sofa. The walls were covered with posters, photographs, calendars, and small flags that are widely used to commemorate special events, such as anniversaries and sporting competitions.

When I first visited the office, I noted that the largest and brightest poster was of Jesus with a bleeding heart directly behind the secretary. I also noted that two small, black-and-white sketches of Marx, Lenin, and Trotsky (names and head-and-shoulder profiles) were tacked to two walls, as were the ubiquitous posters/calendars of topless blonde women. I was most taken aback by the topless calendar girls that were displayed in nearly all businesses, and in all of the radio station's offices. None of the research, including Nash's

(1979) outstanding ethnography of Bolivian tin miners, ever mentioned the universal presence of these displays.

The variety in the symbolic imagery decorating this most public area of the station revealed complexities in the ideology assumed to bind and define this alternative media practice. The suggested complexities were made more problematic by the short video shot by the secretary's husband. For about five minutes, he taped his wife working in her office, surveying her surroundings while she typed and talked to me. In this clip, he only used two close-ups: one on his wife's typewriter, the other on three, three-by-five inch photographs of people in the radio studio that had been placed in one large picture frame. The images jumped out at me as I was logging tape after leaving the field precisely because of what they failed to emphasize. In moving the camera from the secretary to the photographs, the cameraman slowly zoomed in on the wall. During the zoom, the profiles of Marx, Lenin, and Trotsky shared the middle of the frame with the photographs. As the zoom drew nearer, I fully expected the camera to center on the profiles, but it moved smoothly up to the photographs where it remained for several seconds. That the camera operator ignored making close-ups of Marx, Lenin, and Trotsky raised doubts about the importance of class ideology, as reflected in its only symbolic representations in this case.

The question of dominant ideologies emerged a second time in a half-hour video taped during an Independence Day celebration. One of the radio station's technical operators took the camera out and told me that I should have a record of the public celebrations in Huanuni.

Again, when I logged tape after leaving the field, I was astounded by the content. I had been present at the celebration, which involved three principal activities: (a) official proclamations, (b) continuous commentary from loudspeakers, mainly provided by members of the radio station, and (c) band music and marching by children and teachers. My field notes overwhelmingly focused on the commentaries and radio station involvement

in the festivities. The station used the celebration as a platform to denounce economic imperialism and the neoliberal policies being enacted in Bolivia.

The video of the event, however, contained no commentaries or interviews, but more than 30 minutes of children marching to the day's most frequently played tunes, the "Marine Corps Hymn" and "When Johnny Comes Marching Home." In analyzing this, I was asked by a colleague if the camera operator had children in the parade. He did not, but it is possible that he was focusing on the familial aspects of the celebration. Nevertheless, the space and time given over to proclamations and denunciations was so pronounced that their absence throws into question the dominance of ideology as the binding element in alternative media. Because these examples came to my attention after leaving the field, they operate primarily as heuristic devices for future study.

Example 3

A final example from the field illustrates the value of participatory methods in documenting events that would otherwise be unavailable to the researcher. During my stay in Huanuni, two miners died in a blasting accident, where they were overcome by toxic fumes. The station manager of Radio Nacional felt it was important to document the funeral, and he videotaped the wake, mass, procession, and burial. In this situation, the use of a camcorder by an outsider would have been an inappropriate intrusion. In fact, I discouraged the station manager from taping the event, imposing my own norms of appropriateness on the situation. He assured me that the camera would not cause a problem. A speech delivered from a flatbed truck, immediately before the coffins were lowered, is included here in its entirety.

> We are here to observe the loss of compañeros Cruz and Martínez, who have left behind orphaned children and widows. They are experiencing very difficult circumstances. This is the daily struggle of the miners, of the workers. This is the form of confronting neoliberal policies. Every position in the workplace is a trench

in the struggle, friends. For this reason, we should not rest. We should not feel overwhelmed. Every day, all of these experiences should be engraved in your memory because this is the way to confront those who want to see the destruction of the Bolivian labor movement, those who want to destroy the national mining industry. The compañeros to whom we bid farewell today are the very representations of the workers struggle. For this reason, we will follow them as examples of the struggle that they are leaving us. We will not forget that the path of the struggle is the same one they walked. They offered their lives for their work. But behind that act was also the defense of the mines. Many of us are left behind in this constant unbreakable struggle in a unified compact. Compañeros, we know how to defend the nationalization of the mines. So we tell our compañeros not good-bye, but until we next meet, because this is the place where we are all going to fall, compañeros. Help me testify today, together, Glory to compañero Cruz.

[crowd]: Glory.

Glory to compañero Martínez.

[crowd]: Glory.

The tape contains much more than is presented here, but I selected this portion to counterpoint the place of ideology discussed in example 2, above. I found this example to be typical of the public discourse used by radio personnel and union officials. The rapid shift from personal matters in the first, two sentences, to ideological beliefs, in the remainder of the speech, is remarkable. The funeral was organized by the union and accompanied by two days of somber, classical music on the radio per custom. The intense union involvement in the funeral--as in the Independence Day celebration--helps to explain how and where ideology functions within tin miner culture. The findings generated here will be valuable in refining and expanding alternative media theories.

Conclusion

This use of participatory methods was part of this project's design from its inception. Though I was not in the field long enough to offer any definitive or generalizable conclusions, the findings here make valuable contributions to documentary ethnography and warrant further experimentation with participatory methods.

Indigenously generated videos were very useful, even though there were no VCRs in the field to play back tapes and generate discussion. Ideally, analysis of images should occur throughout the project with regular input from the research subjects. In poor countries like Bolivia, however, this kind of analysis is not usually an option. The usefulness of the videos in this project, despite this shortcoming, is a testament to the flexibility of camcorder technology. The self-generated images offered a window into the reality of Bolivian tin miners' radio that validated some ideas, while calling into question other baseline assumptions. Adding playback capability to future studies could only enhance research, but should not act as a prerequisite to using vidoes, or, indeed, film and photography.

In example 1, the videotape was enormously valuable in postfield analysis. The tape verified assertions made in an in-depth interview, and, because video can be played again and again, it added depth to the analysis. Using videotape in this way contributes to the overall quality of research, and begins to answer very difficult questions of validity, a major difficulty in qualitative studies.

Examples 2 and 3 functioned, not to validate understandings, but to question previous beliefs surrounding tin miners' radio. Radical praxis has been emphasized by numerous alternative media scholars, in addition to those already noted (Barlow, 1990; O'Connor, 1990a; Simpson Grinberg,1986). The images generated by rather low-level radio employees revealed some of the weaknesses in this position, as well as exposing some of the ideological contradictions in everyday life in Bolivian tin mining culture. The images

suggest that ideology may not be the unifying tie that binds alternative media practice at all, but operates as sort of an official rubric for public display and consumption. Alternative media, if it is to be distinguished from the mainstream, must define itself in its participatory procedures, not in class-conscious ideology and struggle.

The generation of data reflecting social reality from the actor's perspective has implications that reach beyond the methodological concerns of researchers, and speak to the routine practice of journalism. The video images captured during the summer project provide convincing evidence that social subjects view and represent themselves differently from the portrayals generated by experts--in this case an academic, but more frequently, a journalist. This clear distinction suggests that journalism and its readers stand much to gain by incorporating participatory aspects into the generation of news. One of the only examples of participation in journalism in the United States has demonstrated the potential of this strategy ("Shooting back," 1990).

Nevertheless, the use of video in this case made its most significant contribution to the research community by offering tangible products to the local culture and history. A tape that I shot of a locally sponsored talent show was transmitted on the miners' local television repeater. Also, copies of edited programs incorporating aspects from the tapes produced by radio personnel have been mailed to the community for broadcast and archives. This method has provided a natural way for me to maintain meaningful contact with the radio personnel, connections that will be of enormous practical value for reentering the field later. That this was the greatest contribution of the research project is of little doubt to me. On the night of my going away party, one of the speeches noted that many researchers have made data-gathering pilgrimages to Huanuni, where the people have always given freely. This was the first time that anything had ever been returned.

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